Not long after the arrival of Samuel de Champlain and his men in Quebec, in July of 1608, the plan to establish a permanent trading post there was threatened.

Champlain was tending his garden when a sailor came up to him, asking to speak in private.

The sailor said that the locksmith Antoine Natel, along with four others, had been hired by the Basques and Spaniards to murder Champlain. The sailor added that enemies would land as soon as they had heard that their conspiracy had been successful.

When Champlain summoned Natel, he shook with fear and immediately denounced his accomplices and their leader, Jean Duval, the second locksmith of the settlement.

Champlain invited the conspirators to come at sundown, to have some wine. They had barely had time to uncork the wine when they were arrested and thrown into prison.

Champlain promised to pardon them if they confessed. But after they wrote and signed statements, he had them clapped in irons. After a perfunctory trial, Duval was condemned to death, and Champlain sent the three others back to France, recommending they be sent to the gallows.

"To set an example...Jean Duval was hanged, and strangled. His head placed on the end of a stake to be exhibited in the most prominent part of our fort...to set an example for those remaining, that they wisely fulfill their duty in the future, and that the Basques and Spaniards of whom there were many thereabouts could not repossess it."

Champlain also calculated the effect of the sinister scarecrow on another group, the natives who lived around the settlement. For the Huron and Montagnais who were already trading furs with the French in Tadoussac, the message was clear: Champlain meant business as far as his enemies were concerned. They needed a valuable ally like him in their ongoing war against the formidable Iroquois.